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ABSTRACT

As an initial effort to assess reading in correctional institutions, a questionnaire was sent to some 70 state directors of corrections, both adult and juvenile, by the National Clearinghouse for Offender Literacy Programs which is sponsored by the American Bar Association, the American Correctional Association, and the National Association of Public Continuing and Adult Education. Seventy-four percent of the questionnaires were returned, representing 36 states plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Bureau of Prisons. Some of the findings are that eleven percent of those reporting stated that the institutions in their states are part of a local school district. One hundred percent of the respondents stated that they teach reading in the institutions within their states. Tests are administered by many agencies to varying numbers of inmates. Seventy-five percent of the state respondents indicated that they were interested in receiving help with their reading improvement programs. Types of assistance desired are discussed. A list of responding states and agencies is provided. (MKM)

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American Bar Association

Commission on Correctional Facilities and Services

1705 DeSales Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20036 • 202 223-1528

October, 1973 Coordination Bulletin #21

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CLEARINGHOUSE FOR OFFENDER LITERACY PROGRAMS

Summary of 56-State Preliminary Survey on Basic Literacy Training, Testing, and School District Organization in State Correctional Systems

In August, 1973, the American Bar Association, in cosponsorship with the American Correctional Association and the National Association of Public Continuing and Adult Education, established a National Clearinghouse for Offender Literacy Programs. The purpose of the project was to stimulate and provide national guidance in the development of effective programs to reduce functional illiteracy among the nation's more than 400,000 institutionalized offenders (adult and juvenile). Functional illiteracy (inability to meet minimal reading demands of modern society) is a problem frequently encountered in correctional institutions and among convicted offenders. Evidence exists that it occurs with greater frequency here than in the population-at-large and may indeed be a handicap confronting up to one-third of all incarcerated persons. Yet, it is difficult to imagine a more crippling bar to rehabilitation, community reintegration, and productive job placement of the released offender than inability to read and write in a literate, complex society.

As an initial effort to assess reading in correctional institutions, a questionnaire was transmitted by the Clearinghouse to some 70 state directors of corrections, both adult and juvenile. It was forwarded with an introductory announcement of the establishment of the ABA Clearinghouse for Offender Literacy Programs and aimed at rather universal issues which would relate to all state supported institutions. The following information is a rough summary of approximately 74 percent of the seventy inquiries (representing responses from 36 states plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U. S. Bureau of Prisons returned to date).

School District Information

Of those states responding to this question: some 11 percent of those reporting say that the institutions in their states are part of a local school district (five states and Puerto Rico). Consequently, educational decisions would be made in conjunction with that group. 30 percent stated that they were part of a special school district created within their states (15 states) but further research indicates that this question might have been misconstrued and that considerably fewer states

have actually created a special school district to handle public education within correctional facilities (adult and juvenile)*

Institutions Teaching Reading

100 percent of the respondents have stated that they teach reading in the institutions within their states (or department as in the instances when two reports from one state were returned - one adult and one youth-oriented.

Testing in the Area of Reading

Over 95 percent of the agencies reporting (31 states plus D. C. and the Federal Bureau of Prisons) stated they did administer tests to inmates of varying numbers at certain points during their incarceration. 48 percent stated that all inmates were tested. Of the remainder, only three respondents (or about five percent) stated they did no testing. This will change in one state in 1974 when they will begin testing all incoming inmates. The remainder reported that they test less than 100 percent of the inmates at some time during their stay in correctional institutions. This occurred mainly when an individual entered an education program, ABE (Adult Basic Education) or GED (General Educational Development).

Assistance with Reading Programs

The final question dealt with interest on the part of states in receiving help with their reading improvement thrusts.

Of those responding to this question 75 percent (29 states plus Puerto Rico and the Federal Bureau of Prisons) replied that they would be interested in some type of assistance; 15 percent were not interested in assistance and slightly more than seven percent gave a conditional response.

Even more interesting than the statistics are the types of assistance that were mentioned as having a high priority. Following is a summary of those comments:

- There were a great number of statements which referred to the desire for information about new material of a high adult interest level, but written with a low reading level. Included in this general category were interest in "best approaches: and multi-media types of material which would tend to motivate some individuals who have not related to print materials in a positive manner.

- Assessment of reading needs with more specificity surfaced in a number of questionnaires. A closely related topic -- that of choosing appropriate materials -- was also of concern.

* States with verified special "correctional school districts" and their dates of statutory authorization are Illinois (1961), Connecticut (1969), Texas (1971), New Jersey (1972); and Ohio, by virtue of prior permissive legislation, by the State Board of Education (April, 1973).

• Recent research on effective methods and systems was mentioned a number of times as being of prime interest.

• Information on learning disabilities and how to cope with them was of concern to a lesser number of respondents.

• In-service training and upgrading of staff was of concern to three states. Programs and/or techniques which could be used in this effort are being sought.

• A substantial number of states were interested in obtaining information from institutions or other states about programs which "work". There is a definite interest in a two-way sharing of information concerning reading approaches.

• Finally, there was one response which indicated an interest in materials which were developed for Spanish-speaking Americans and for specific ethnic groups.

It should be pointed out that even though the sample size was very small the power represented by a single response is quite great. The survey population here was whole state systems rather than individual prisons, jails or other correctional facilities. A single state response, therefore, can reflect a vast amount of interest in a category or problem related to reading in general. This sample then, within the narrow limits of the brief questionnaire inquiry, reflects the thinking, some of the operational patterns, and the concerns of a majority of the nation's correctional administrators with respect to reading as one of the instructional processes for which institution rehabilitation programs are responsible.

In October of 1973, a comprehensive and much more detailed survey on reading and basic instruction in correctional institutions was undertaken by the Clearinghouse for Offender Literacy Programs. This went to all correctional institutions reporting an educational program (adult and juvenile) instead of the 50-state departments. Results are expected to be available in early 1974.

The following is a summary of selected data contained in the report.

LIST OF RESPONDING STATES AND AGENCIES

1.	Alabama	State Board of Corrections
2.	Alaska	Department of Health & Welfare, Division of Corrections
3.	Arizona	Department of Corrections

Responding States & Agencies (contd.)

4.	Arkansas*	Department of Corrections; Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services - Juvenile Services
5.	California	Department of Corrections; Department of Youth Authority
6.	Colorado*	Division of Corrections; Division of Youth Services
7.	Connecticut*	Department of Corrections; Department of Children and Youth Services
8.	Delaware*	Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Adult Corrections; Division of Youth Corrections
9.	Florida*	Department of Health and Rehabilitation Services, Division of Corrections; Division of Youth Services
10.	Georgia*	State Board of Corrections; Department of Family and Children Services, Division for Children and Youth
11.	Hawaii	Department of Social Services and Housing, Corrections Division
12.	Idaho	State Board of Corrections
13.	Illinois*	Department of Corrections, Adult Division; Juvenile Division
14.	Indiana	Department of Corrections
15.	Iowa	Department of Social Services, Bureau of Adult Correctional Services
16.	Louisiana	Department of Corrections
17.	Maine	Department of Mental Health and Corrections, Bureau of Corrections
18.	Maryland*	Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, Division of Corrections; State Department of Juvenile Services
19.	Michigan*	Department of Corrections; Office of Youth Services
20.	Minnesota	Department of Corrections
21.	Missouri	State Department of Corrections

Responding States & Agencies (contd.)

22.	Nebraska	Department of Public Instruction, Division of Corrections
23.	Nevada	Department of Health, Welfare and Rehabilitation
24.	New Mexico	Department of Corrections
25.	New York*	Department of Corrections; Division for Youth
26.	No. Carolina*	Department of Social Rehabilitation and Control; Office of Corrections
27.	No. Dakota	Division of Institutions
28.	Ohio*	Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections; Youth Commission
29.	Oklahoma	Department of Corrections
30.	Pennsylvania*	Department of Justice, Division of Corrections; Office of Children and Youth
31.	Puerto Rico	Department of Justice, Division of Corrections
32.	Rhode Island	Department of Corrections
33.	So. Carolina*	Department of Corrections; State Board of Juvenile Corrections
34.	So. Dakota	State Board of Charities and Corrections
35.	Texas	Department of Corrections
36.	Utah	Division of Corrections
37.	Vermont	Department of Corrections
38.	Virginia*	State Department of Welfare and Institutions; Division of Corrections; Division of Youth Services
39.	Washington*	Department of Social and Health Services, Correctional Services; Juvenile Corrections Services
40.	Wash., D. C.	Department of Corrections
41.	Wyoming	State Board of Charities and Reform
42.	Federal Bureau of Prisons	

* Separate adult and juvenile agency responses were received from these states.

RESPONSES ON READING TESTING PROCEDURES

Questionnaire Item # 3

"Do you administer or obtain reading test scores for inmates in any of your institutions? If yes, indicate which inmates this data is obtained for:

STATE	THOSE ENTERING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM	ALL INMATES	FELONS ONLY	MISDEMEANANTS ONLY	JUVENILES ONLY	INMATES SELECTED WITH SCREENING TEST
1. Alabama	X					
2. Alaska	X					
3. Arizona	X				X	
4. Arkansas		X				
5. California		X				
6. Colorado		X				
7. Connecticut		X				
8. Delaware	X					X[1]
9. Florida		X				
10. Georgia		X				
11. Hawaii		X				
12. Idaho		X				
13. Illinois		X				
14. Indiana		X				
15. Iowa		X				
16. Louisiana		X				
17. Maine	X				X	
18. Maryland		X				
19. Michigan		X				
20. Minnesota						X
21. Missouri	X					
22. New Mexico	X					
23. New York		X				
24. No. Carolina		X				
25. No. Dakota	X					
26. Ohio		X				
27. Oklahoma	X[2]					
28. Rhode Island	X[2]					
29. So. Carolina	X				X	
30. So. Dakota		X[3]				
31. Texas						X
32. Utah		X				
33. Virginia			X	Few	X	
34. Washington		X				
35. Wash., D.C.	X					
36. F.B.P.		X				
* Totals	12	21	1	-	4	3

*Note: Some states may have responded for only one type of institution; e.g., juvenile, thus the true status may be somewhat distorted.

1. Sentences of one year or more 2. Expanding testing to all inmates soon 3. Oral test only

STATES INTERESTED IN ASSISTANCE IN READING PROGRAMS

Questionnaire Item # 5

"Would your department be interested in assistance with your current reading programs or in establishing new reading programs?"

Unconditional Yes Respondants (many mentioned specific target programs and/or problems)

1. Alaska
2. Arizona
3. Arkansas
4. California (Y) *
5. Colorado (Y)
6. Connecticut (Y) (A)
7. Delaware (Y) (A)
8. Hawaii
9. Idaho
10. Illinois (Y) (A)
11. Indiana
12. Louisiana
13. Maine
14. Maryland (Y) (A)
15. Michigan (A)
16. Minnesota
17. Missouri
18. New York (Y) (A)
19. North Carolina
20. North Dakota
21. Ohio (Y)
22. Oklahoma
23. Puerto Rico
24. Rhode Island
25. South Dakota
26. Utah
27. Virginia (Y) (A)
28. Washington
29. Washington, D. C.
30. Federal Bureau of Prisons

Qualified Yes or Perhaps

1. Colorado (A)
2. Florida
3. Michigan (Y)
4. Washington (Y)

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* Where it was possible to differentiate between Youth (Y) and Adult (A), it was done.

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Commission on Correctional Facilities and Services

AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION

1705 DeSales Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 (202) 223-1328

August 24, 1973

TO All Directors of State Correctional Departments - Adult and Juvenile

Our Commission on Correctional Facilities and Services is happy to announce a grant from the United States Office of Education which will make it possible to establish and operate a National Clearinghouse for Offender Literacy Programs. The Clearinghcuse is a joint endeavor of the American Bar Association, American Correctional Association and National Association for Public Continuing and Adult Education. It will focus on the problem of functional illiteracy which handicaps so many offenders and will offer guidance, help and stimulation for programs to remedy that major obstacle to an effective rehabilitative adjustment.

We feel the Clearinghouse service will be of interest to you and members of your staff. The program will operate a response service to supply information and consultation on a demand basis and we consider administrators like yourself, and your educational staffs, our prime service clientele. Attached is a "project brief" which provides information in somewhat greater detail than this letter. We will be seeking information and building data banks in our area of interest on a nationwide scale.

At the outset, I am taking the liberty of asking your assistance in securing some basic information through completion of the attached form. This was designed as a brief inquiry to avoid unnecessary intrusion into your department's work schedule and should take only a few minutes for appropriate staff to handle. Yet it will become an important perspective document for our Clearinghouse as we seek to assess the range of needs and status of ongoing activity with basic reading programs. The form is being mailed to all adult and juvenile (or combined) state corrections departments.

Thank you for your cooperation. We are looking forward to a productive working relationship and welcome your inquiries.

Sincerely,

RICHARD J. HUGHES
Chairman

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cc: Dr. E. Preston Sharp, Executive Director, American Correctional Assoc.
Mr. James R. Dorland, Executive Secretary, National Association for Public Continuing and Adult Education
Dr. John Helfrich, Director, Clearinghouse for Offender Literacy Programs

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR OFFENDER LITERACY PROGRAMS

Questionnaire for State Directors of Adult and Juvenile Corrections

1. Are the institutions in your department (or their educational Programs) incorporated or included, in terms of financial support and teaching resources:

   As part of the local school district — Yes ☐ No ☐

   As part of a special school district applicable to your department — Yes ☐ No ☐

   Comments: _____

   _____

2. Do you teach basic reading in your institutions? — Yes ☐ No ☐

   If yes, indicate briefly where this is done and what supervision is imposed by your department: _____

   _____

3. Do you administer or obtain reading test scores for inmates in any of your institutions? — Yes ☐ No ☐

   (a) If yes, indicate which inmates this data is obtained for: _____

   _____

   (b) If yes, would such data be available to the Clearinghouse? — Yes ☐ No ☐

   (c) If yes, give the name and address of the person or office to contact for such information _____

   _____

[see reverse side]

4. Who would be the appropriate person in your department to consult with concerning the general status of reading instruction in your state institutions?

_____
Name and Title

_____
Address

5. Would your department be interested in assistance with your current reading programs or in establishing new reading programs? Yes ☐ No ☐

Comments concerning kind of help or information desired: _____

_____

_____

6. Please attach any reports, materials, directives, etc. which are readily available and describe or illustrate your department's reading programs and basic education efforts and how they are organized.

_____
Name of Responding Official

_____
Name of Responding Correctional Department

Please complete and return this form in the self-addressed return envelope provided to:

ABA Clearinghouse for Offender Literacy Programs
1705 DeSales Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036